

Commissioners:

R. JACK MCKERNAN
Chairman

TONY R. MUSSARE
Vice Chairman

RICHARD MIRABITO
Secretary



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**Minutes of the Meeting of
September 10, 2019
Board Room, Executive Plaza
Pine Street, Williamsport**

Commissioner McKernan - Present
Commissioner Mussare - Present
Commissioner Mirabito - Present

Solicitor Smith - Present

1.0 OPERATIONS

1.1 CONVENE COMMISSIONERS MEETING. The meeting was convened at 10:00 a.m.

Bids were opened for following: County Farm Road Reconstruction (2 bidders)
Food Products (4 bidders)

2.0 ACTION ITEMS

2.1 APPROVE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE CASH REQUIREMENT REPORT: A motion by Mr. Mirabito and seconded by Mr. Mussare and passed (3-0), approved through September 18, 2019, for payment on September 11, 2019 in the amount of \$620,403.

6.0 COMMISSIONER COMMENT. The floor was opened to commissioner comment and none were received:

Mr. McKernan – Last Friday, The GEO –Re-entry Program had a graduation, I would like to acknowledge the importance that the program has had over this five year period. The commissioners have been getting a bed space report. In Sept 2016, the County averaged 15 beds available, 2019 we have 25 beds available. In 2016, PRC 1 male bed, this morning we have 30 male beds and 1 female bed available. Today, we have no one housed out of county. This year we are housing 14 Federal inmates, we had none in 2016. Housing these Inmates is an avg. of \$33k a month. We hope that this money helps offset the cost of housing inmates outside of the County, if there is a need. At the transition program, we heard emotional testimonies from those who have graduated from the program. It says a

lot about the people who are working in the program and how the counselors care about the program and what they do. We acknowledge the staff, John Stahl for working with GEO to make the program successful.

Mr. Mussare - This GEO Re-entry program is one of the best, if not the best in the country. If we were to include the Federal Marshal's beds, that is an average of 70 available beds, that is quite a swing. That is how successful they are, that is a lot of money the county is not spending. The probation officers customized the program to fit the County.

Mr. Mirabito - I don't want to get into a huge debate about GEO. It is a much more complicated issue. I spoke to someone in the recovery community and they said, "What Geo is doing is equivalent to having the drug companies running drug rehab centers. " Geo was in the 80's and 90's one of the largest proponents of mandatory sentencing in the Country, along with Correctional Corporation of America, they pushed policies and lobbying to build prisons. Now, it is no longer a trend, and they are in the day reporting program, which is great. If we want to be honest about what is happening in this country, we have to look at how we have so many people prison in the first place. We need to question, when we did that contract three years ago, a no bid contract and the other company came in 30% less. It is a more complicated issue. I am thrilled people are getting their lives together. We need to ask ourselves, is GEO the most effective way to get people back on track. I am disappointed that we have allowed the state to send their people to GEO and that the County is picking up the tab. GEO says we are getting a discount because of it. We have spent close to \$3 million dollars. We owe it to the taxpayers to have a clear analysis by an external auditor.

Mr. Mussare-We had a \$60K prison assessment that told us the trends. Those trends were going along with the national average. That assessment told us there was no way, we were going to without building a prison. Just no way were we getting out of building a prison. We have paid GEO \$3 million. I can tell you this for sure. We would have had to pay three times more for a new prison, or housing inmates out of the county or for their medications. We have to look at as a savings not as a loss. I have a lot of confidence in the GEO program, have an audit, you will come to the same conclusions.

Mr. Mirabito - I believe the overcrowding is being driven by mental health issues. The question should be, do we need a mental health facility. We were taking an incarceration approach instead of dealing with the mental health issues through mental health approach. They go into our prison and they get worse. Should we take another approach to getting inmates with mental health issues the help they need and out of the prison? The State is not going to take responsibility and we need to look into a regional mental health facility.

7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT. The floor was opened to public comment and none was received:

Scott Metzger- Working 1st hand with the GEO Re-entry reporting, as a probation officer. I can show the evidence that it is working. In 2013, before the prison study, showed we needed a program and Commissioner Mussare said go for it. We were spending over \$600K in overcrowding before GEO came in; now we are at zero. In a County with similar characteristics, He stated that Franklin County with similar characteristics as Lycoming County got rid of their re-entry program and President Judge came and said they did not like GEO, got rid it. Now they have massive overcrowding and their inmates are spread out in five other counties. Prescription costs, in 2017 GEO took over EM, the savings alone was \$2.4 million last I heard. The County does not pay prescription costs for the inmates when they are on EM. We do have mental health assistance for the prison.

Larry Stout – Attended the Geo Re-entry graduation and I was really impressed by the testimonies. The graduates spoke about the power of being treated like a human being with dignity and respect consistently by the counselors, after having been disregarded for so long. If this idea could just be disseminated, it could just turn around the way people look at each other. They began to look forward to attending GEO and began to model treating others with dignity and respect in their own lives in similar fashion. I was astounded. I learned so much.

Elliott Weiss - Adding an employment component to the program is key.

Mr. McKernan – The program does send some of the GEO clients to LCRMS to work. They make \$8.00 an hour and are provided transportation to and from work. John Stahl and APO are working with GEO and this collaboration is working. There are also an idea about some work at the golf course.

Matthew McDermott – It is important to note, that a significant number of graduates were not at graduation because they have jobs. Over 50%.

8.0 NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING. Mr. McKernan announced the next regularly scheduled meeting to be held Thursday, September 12, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. at the Executive Plaza, 330 Pine Street, 1st Floor Commissioners' Briefing Room.

9.0 ADJOURN COMMISSIONERS' MEETING. The meeting was adjourned at 10:59 a.m.